Archeological Testing
Cinder Block Garage
112 East Leigh Street
Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site
Richmond, Virginia

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1995

INTRODUCTION

Archeological testing at the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site was conducted on December 7, 1994 to evaluate the spatial extent of a feature identified adjacent to the cinder block garage at the rear of 112 East Leigh Street. This feature, first identified in the archeological survey of the site in Test Units 5 and 8, was identified as a drainage feature dating from the early twentieth century (Figure 1).

The feature consisted of randomly placed stone rubble mortared to a sloped rectangular concrete slab located 0.6 feet below ground surface and 0.5 feet away from the structure (Figure 2). To evaluate the spatial extent of this feature and to confirm its function, a single test unit was excavated between the existing south door and the southeast corner of the garage (Figure 1). If this feature was intended for drainage, then it should continue along the entire length of the wall, traversing the location of the test.

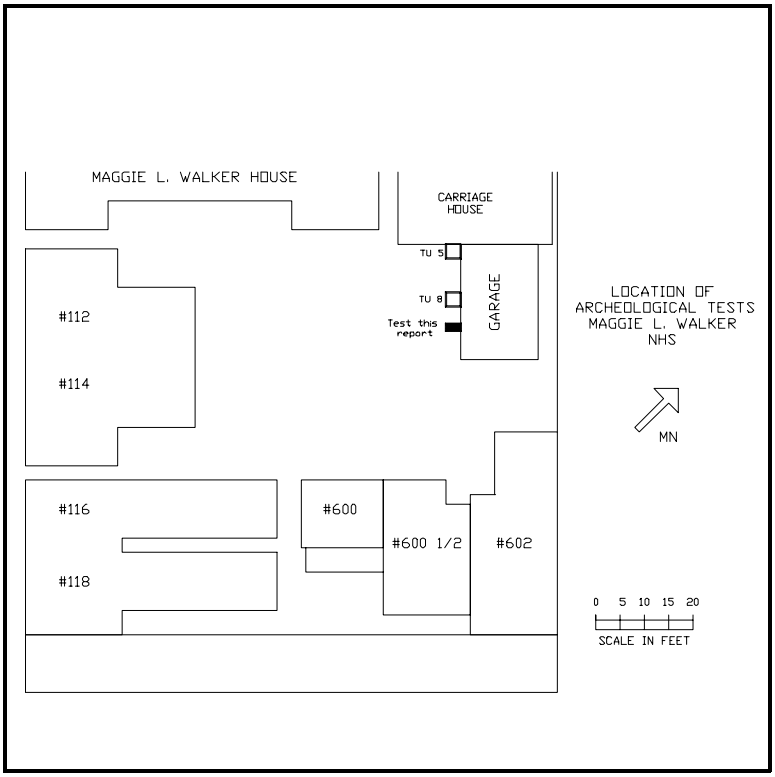

Figure 1 Location of referenced archeological tests.

FIELD METHODS

A single test unit measuring 1.5 feet east/west by 3 feet north south was placed six feet west of the southeast corner of the cinder block garage (Figure 1). The test dimensions were selected to balance the need to expose enough of the feature (assuming its presence) for identification while minimizing the impacts to the integrity of the site. Excavation was conducted by natural stratigraphic units. All standard excavation records were kept and all procedures met the Secretary's Standards for Archeology. Elevations were measured relative to the existing

site datum and are presented in this report in correspondence to that datum. Excavation was conducted by the Regional Archeologist of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office and by the Senior Field Archeologist of the Division of Archeology and Historic Architecture, Valley Forge National Historical Park.

Figure 2: Photograph of stone rubble feature.

RESULTS OF INVESTIGATIONS

Stratigraphy

Excavations revealed four distinct strata reflecting those observed in Test Units 5 and 8 and elsewhere in the site (Figure 3). The feature identified in those units, however, was markedly absent as was any sign of its removal.

The initial stratum consisted of very dark gray (Munsell color 10YR 3/1) humic loam extending to 0.4 feet below surface. Containing modern debris, it dates from relatively recent attempts by the park to control water flow.

Stratum two consisted of black (Munsell color 10YR 2/1) coal ash and cinder extending from 0.4 to 1.3 feet below surface. This layer is deeper where it forms the builder's trench for the garage's foundation. This layer is impacted by construction of the foundation only on the west wall. Its width is insufficient to account for removal of the drainage feature observed in Test Units 5 and 8.

Stratum three consisted of black (Munsell color 10YR 2/1) and gray (Munsell color 10 YR 6/1) ash approximately 0.15 feet thick. Like Stratum two, it is impacted by the builder's trench for the garage in the west profile.

Stratum four consists of yellowish brown (Munsell color 10YR 5/4) sterile clay which forms the subsoil over the entire site.

Interpretation

Excavation of the test unit identified stratigraphy identical to the rest of the undisturbed portions of the site. No features were identified which could relate to the drainage feature identified in the previous site survey, or to its former presence and subsequent removal. The absence of any trace of the feature brought into question its supposed function. If it had served a drainage function, why did it not extend the length of the garage?

An asymmetrical construction should relate to an asymmetrical organization of the building. An examination of the exterior of the building indicated that a hung tracked door had been installed on the west half of the south wall of the garage (Figure 4). The current door opening has been reduced in width from 8.5 feet to 2.5 feet and the threshold has been raised approximately 1.5 feet. Might the feature have functioned as a lower track for the door, especially in light of the increasing elevation of the yard and the distance between the slab and the garage? A chaining pin was used to probe the ground between the existing doorway and Test Unit 5. It was found by an informal excavation at the location where the chaining pin was not rejected that the concrete slab ended at the exact location that the overhead door track began. Although the stone rubble extended into the threshold area, the slab ended at the exact location at which the door track began.

The results of this examination suggest the following scenario. At the time of construction, the deposition of the fill deposits was well underway. The proper functioning of the tracked door required that the space adjacent to the garage remain free of soil. This was effected by the construction previously identified as a drainage feature. It is uncertain if the cobble feature predated the cement slab by any length of time. Moreover, it is impossible to determine if any portion of this construction was visible on the surface at any time. Nevertheless, with the increasing elevation of the grade, the efficacy of the cement feature ceased, use of the sliding door

was abandoned and the present doorway and threshold elevation was created. It is impossible to tell, without photo documentation, the date that event occurred.

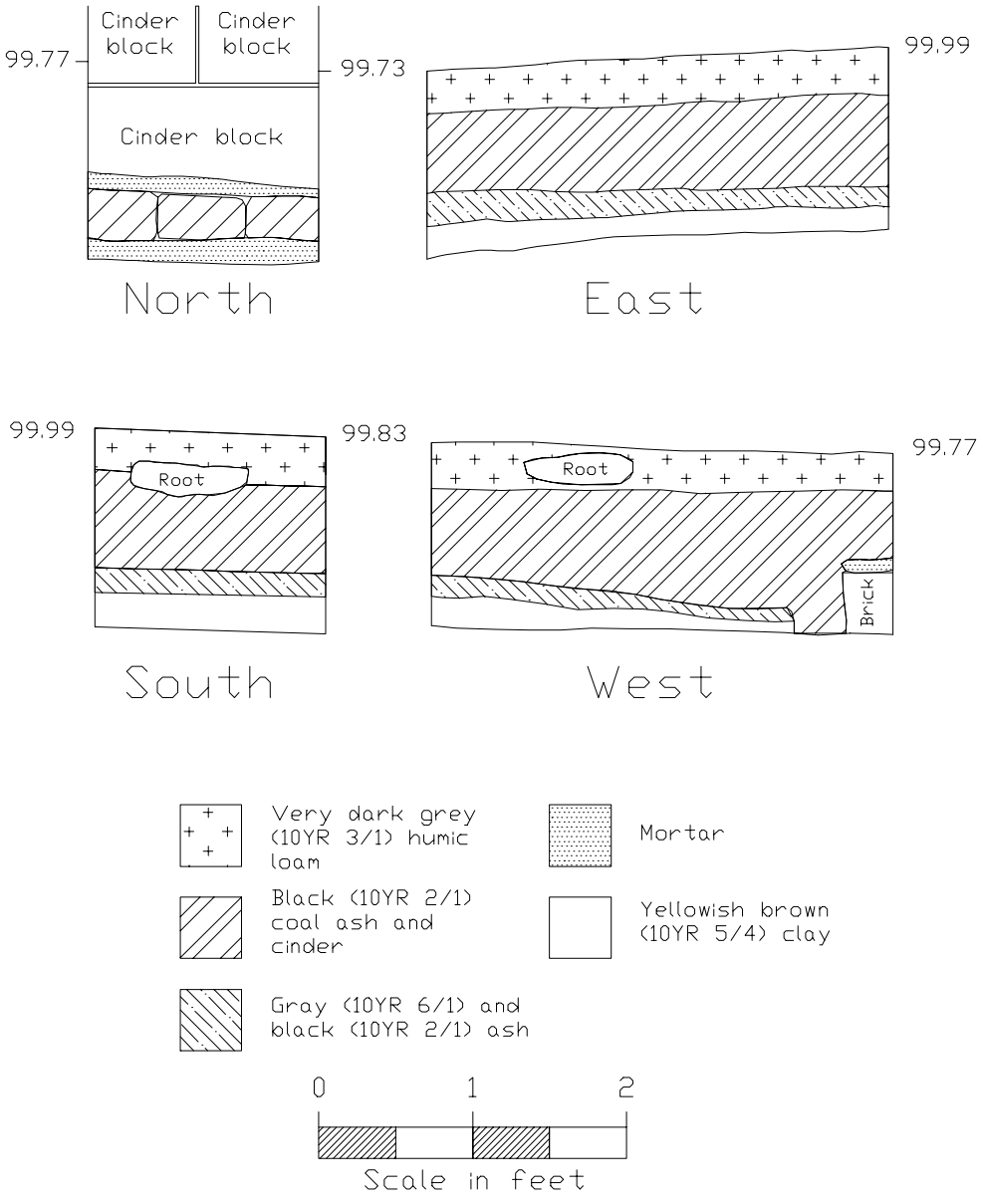

Figure 3 Profile drawings of test unit.